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WASHINGTON POST
11 DECEMBER 1982

Reagan Again Says Soviet Union Influences Anti-Nuclear Groups

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Apparently unconverted by a White House chat earlier this week with anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott, President Reagan yesterday repeated his view that the Soviet Union is manipulating the nuclear freeze movement. This time he added that the movement originated with a Soviet front called the World Peace Council.

Almost as the president spoke, the National Conference of State Legislatures voted to endorse the freeze, calling on Reagan to apply to civilian purposes the money he could save from the arms race.

Answering a question during a small news conference in the Oval Office, Reagan said he had verified "several rather well-documented articles" he had cited in November as support for his charge of Soviet manipulation. Except for a few cases of "journalistic exaggeration," he said, "they did check out."

The articles included two in the Reader's Digest and a report from the House Intelligence Committee that was classified until Thursday.

In making the report public, committee Chairman Edward P. Boland (D-Mass.) said the "bottom line" of testimony from FBI and CIA officials, as well as from a prominent Soviet defector, was that there was "no evidence that the Soviets direct, manage or manipulate the nuclear freeze movement" despite intense efforts to do so.

Reagan apparently does not agree. "The originating organization" of the international freeze movement is the World Peace Council, "a Soviet organization supported by and maintained by them," he said yesterday. Although most freeze supporters may be sincere, Reagan continued, "one must look to see whether, well-intentioned though it may be, this movement might be carrying water that they're not aware of for another purpose."

Officials of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign immediately denied being offspring of the World Peace Council, saying the council was only one of many groups that supported the freeze proposal after it was launched in 1980.

"Individuals in the council may support the freeze, but individuals in the Republican Party support it, too," said Barbara Roche, codirector of the freeze clearinghouse in St. Louis.

Reagan maintained his opinion despite a 75-minute meeting Monday evening with Caldicott, the controversial and outspoken activist who heads the antiwar Physicians for Social Responsibility, based in Boston.

In a telephone interview, Caldicott confirmed that she had been brought to meet the president at the White House by Patti Davis, Reagan's daughter, who is for a freeze, and that the three of them had talked privately for more than an hour. But she declined to describe the conversation. "I gave him my assurance I wouldn't talk to anyone about it," she said.

White House sources confirmed that Caldicott and Reagan had exchanged views with little expectation of changing each other's minds but in the hope of understanding one another better. Neither was converted, the sources said.

Caldicott is known for her evangelical speaking style and her stomach-turning descriptions of the aftermath of nuclear war. California Gov. Edmund G. (Jerry) Brown Jr. sought her advice during his 1979-80 presidential campaign, and she is a regular on the anti-nuclear circuit, often heavily criticized by opponents for alleged errors in her presentations.

The National Conference of State Legislatures, which represents all 50 state bodies, resolved at its annual meeting here to ask Reagan "to propose to the Soviet Union a mutual, verifiable moratorium immediately halting the testing, production and development of all nuclear warheads, missiles and delivery systems." Voters approved similar resolutions in eight states and the District of Columbia last month.

Conference staff members said they were surprised that the traditionally conservative group took the action, which became official policy on a 29-to-8 vote. Delegates earlier had rejected, 24-to-12, a substitute resolution that would have supported Reagan's position favoring negotiations for weapons reductions instead of an immediate freeze.

The National League of Cities rejected a freeze proposal last week after heavy debate.